WHERE ARE FACTS?
-- A CASE FOR INTERNAL FACTUAL REALISM

XINLI WANG

1. Introduction

What exists in the world? Are there only simple entities like objects, properties, and relations, or are there also complex entities like events, situations, and facts? Against the background of traditional Aristotelian metaphysics, which pictures reality as consisting of the aggregate of mutually independent individual objects or things, the outstanding innovation of Wittgenstein's ontology is his characterization of the world as an aggregate of facts, not of things *(Tractatus,* I, I.I). Facts are generically different from things or objects. Facts are usually regarded as complex entities consisting of objects, properties, and external relations which either relate a property to an object (say, John is bald) or connect several objects (say, John is taller than Joe). Facts are not simply the aggregate of objects; they are objects standing in relations to each other. Facts are configurations of objects. Following Wittgenstein, the later Russell claims, "The world contains facts." That facts exist is one of those "truism... so obvious that it is almost laughable to mention them." (Russell 1918, pp. 182, 183).

If the world is a totality of facts, what sorts of facts exist in the world? Where are facts? Especially, what is the ontological status of facts? To put it more specifically: (a) are facts linguistic or extra-linguistic entities? (b) If facts are extra-linguistic entities, are they mind independent or relative to languages, theories or conceptual schemes? Among all the three possible responses to these questions, each has some patrons. There are philosophers who treat facts as linguistic entities by identifying facts with true propositions. There are external factual realists who regard facts as extra-linguistic, mind-independent worldly items existing in the

world as it is.[1] There are internal factual realists who claim that, although facts are neither in the world as it is, nor in a language, facts are real and exist in a world under consideration.[2]

Compared with other two positions, the case for internal factual realism has not yet been fully made and badly needs clarification and defense. I intend to provide such a full case for it in this paper. To do this, I need first to clarify the notion of fact (section 2), and then to dismiss the other two alternatives (sections 3 and 4). After that, I present an internal factual realistic interpretation of facts in section 5.

2. Many Faces of Facts

Like most central notions in philosophy, the notion of facts is annoyingly ambiguous. It is not hard at all to provide accepted specimens of the category of facts: the fact that Napoleon was born in Corsica, the fact that water is composed of H_2O, or the fact that the Moon is there. But, what commonality, if any, enables all these cases to be qualified as facts?

In ordinary discourse, we undoubtedly use the term "fact" in a great number of ways. Facts may be opposed to fiction, fancy or imagination; opposed to theory, belief or supposition; or opposed to evaluation, judgment or preference. We use the cognate term "factual" to suggest something settled, accepted, or unquestionable, as something contrasted with opinions. The common-use category of facts includes almost all that exists in the world. The realm of fact may be constituted by all existing spatio-temporal entities, such as particulars, happenings, situations; or the realm may include, in addition to above spatio-temporal entities, existing abstract entities such as properties, relations, categories, etc. By "facts," I certainly not mean this big Santa's bag containing almost any and all beings.

In philosophical discussion, "fact" usually refers to some sorts of complex entities, such as states of affairs, events, happenings, processes, situations, true propositions, even the objects of propositional attitudes or assertions. The simple entities, such as particulars, relations and properties, are excluded from the realm of facts. Besides some specific difficulties with identifying facts with one or more than one of these

---

[1] I use "the world as it is" to refer to the mind-independent world.

[2] I use "the world under consideration" to refer to a mind-dependent world.

complex entities, the problem with this usage of the term is that it causes more confusions than it is supposed to clarify. Notions of state of affairs, events, or situations are the concepts at the same analytical level as the notion of facts. These notions themselves are as annoyingly ambiguous as the notion of fact. For these reasons I will not intend to use "facts" in this second sense either.

The third and the most significant sense of "facts" is revealed by the syntactic form of the expression we use to state or specify facts. There is a general agreement among philosophers that facts are expressible *only* by means of complex symbols, e.g., these linguistic symbols that can be used after "that" to form "that-clauses," such as sentences or other related expressions which can be used in their own right to make statements. In fact, this thesis is a basic assumption underlying Wittgenstein and Russellian doctrine that facts are not named or referred but can only be stated or asserted (Russell 1918, pp. 187-188, 200). As Austin (1950, pp. 116-117) and Strawson (1950, p. 136) have observed, the term "fact" is wedded to that-clauses by which we symbolize facts. In English, we state facts primarily in the following types of sentences or expressions: "The fact is *that* S"; "*That* S is a fact"; "It is a fact *that* S"; "S: *that* is a fact"; "a/the fact *that* S." The that-clauses in terms of which we symbolize facts are neither symbols of objects, nor symbols of the properties of an object, nor symbols of relations between objects. If Othello believes that Desdemona in fact loves Cassio, then what Othello believes is not Desdemona or Cassio, nor Desdemona's love for Cassio, but *that* Desdemona loves Cassio. Furthermore, that-clauses by which we symbolize facts seem not to be the symbols of events or states of affairs in the usual sense. Suppose that Jennifer had her first pregnancy at 25 years old. Then Jennifer's first pregnancy is an event (occurring during a period of time), not a fact. Sometimes we do say that Jennifer's first pregnancy is a fact (in the sense that what is done or what has happened). However, the fact that we express by means of the expression "Jennifer's first pregnancy" (sounds like a referring expression) is not her first pregnancy, but *that* Jenny had a pregnancy that was her first pregnancy. Therefore, this third sense of the term "facts" is different from the two senses mentioned above. It represents an additional, unique sense from the other two, even if there may be some overlapping meanings among them.

On the basis of above considerations, I here propose to restrict our use of the term "facts" in this third sense, that is, facts as entities that are

specified (not just *stated* or *asserted*, not *referred* or *described*) by that-clauses. I refer to this use as a minimal sense of the term "facts." This specific philosophical use of the term "fact" arises as an extension and modification of the common-use of the term in ordinary discourse and differs from other uses in philosophical discussions.

Semantically, there has been a conceptual connection between the notion of truth and the notion of facts. According to Wittgenstein's correspondence theory of truth, a statement is true if and only if it depicts a fact. For Russell, facts are what make propositions (Russellian propositions) true if they are true. Hence propositions, when true, would be identical to facts. For Bolzano, a fact is the state of affairs which exists, or a true proposition. Although different philosophers have different concepts of truth and facts, and connect them in different ways-- either taking the notion of truth as primitive or taking the notion of facts as primitive--one thing seems to be common among them. That is, facts can only be specified by true statements.

In many contexts of ordinary discourses, "it is a fact that S" can be reformulated into "it is true that S" without losing the proper function of the former. For instance, to say that it is a fact that the earth is round is to say that it is true that the earth is round. As Max Black points out, the phrase "it is a fact" in these contexts serves simply as an emphatic device for assertions. Its occurrence marks the speaker's commitment to the truth of an implied subassertion, e.g., that-clause following the phrase (Black 1964, pp. 31-33).

In addition, there is no other way to specify a fact except by means of some true contingent statement. Facts are abstract and are not perceivable as things or events are. "We note that when a detective says 'let us look at the facts' he does not crawl round the carpet, but proceeds to utter a string of statements" (Austin 1950, p. 117). Facts cannot be specified by descriptive expressions. The phrase "the whiteness of the flower" cannot be used to specify the fact that the flower is white, and the expression "Romeo's love for Juliet" does not specify the fact that Romeo loves Juliet. A fact is neither a property nor a relation, but a complex unit which includes object, property or relation as its constituents.[3] This is the reason why Strawson claims that to say that it is a fact

---

[3] Of course, to say that a fact cannot be specified by a descriptive expression does not mean that a fact cannot be described. We do describe a fact when we say

that S is a matter of stating rather than referring or describing (Strawson 1950, p.134). Furthermore, not all statements can be used to specify facts. It is awkward to say that a fact is what is specified by a known false statement. It is no less awkward to say that a fact can be specified by a truthvalueless sentence, such as to say that it is a fact that the present emperor of China is bald.

In conclusion, facts are specified and can only be specified by true statements. We can explain a category only by reference to the mode of thought by which we specify it. A category is merely the concept of one type of entity which is so specified. The category of facts is specified only by the making of true statements; hence facts are nothing but whatever true statements specify. Therefore, I propose the following initial definition of the notion of fact:

Def. A fact is a complex entity specified by a true statement.

I will call this concept of fact "the minimal concept of fact." It is minimal in the sense that it does not tell us what kind of entity a fact is except it is a complex entity. To say that a fact is a complex entity which a true statement *specifies* is not to say (a) that a fact *is identical to* a true proposition; (b) that a fact is what *makes* a statement *true,* or a fact is what *corresponds to* a true statement; or (c) that a fact is what a true statement *states.* All we know so far is that a fact is a complex entity specified by a true statement. So the definition leaves plenty of room for various interpretations of the nature of a fact.

3. External Factual Realism

External factual realism commits itself to the existence of mind-independent facts. Conceptually and historically, this version of realism has been closely attached to a version of the correspondence theory of truth, i.e., the doctrine that a statement is true if and only if it corresponds to a mind-independent extra-linguistic fact. Early Wittgenstein's and Russell's philosophies provide us with good examples of external factual realism, whose basic doctrines can be summarized as follows: (a) the world is the totality of fixed facts; (b) facts are mind-independent extra-linguistic entities; and (c) truth consists in correspondence to such facts or such facts make statements true.

---

that the fact that S is important. But what specify the fact that S is that-clause, e.g., that S.

If facts exist in the world as it is, where are they? Are facts perceivable concrete entities or non-perceivable abstract entities? Factual naturalism contends that facts are *concrete* mind-independent entities (locatable either in space or in time, and observable) existing in the universe. Factual ontologism claims that facts are *abstract* mind-independent entities (not locatable either in space or in time, and not observable).

3.1 Factual Naturalism

For fact-naturalists, (a) a fact exists in the universe as a spatio-temporal entity and/or is observable. So facts are no less real than an object like a rabbit. (b) These concrete facts are real "objective nonlinguistic correlates" to true statements. If we look at the various categories that have some affinity with concrete facts, we usually come up such notions as those of particulars *(locatable)*, happenings / events / episodes / process *(datable)*, or situations *(observable)*.

A. Facts As (Locatable) Particulars

For some fact-naturalists, facts are as concrete as individual objects are. They are *locatable* and/or *datable* as well as *observable*. One version of fact-naturalism is presented by Charles Baylis in his exemplification theory of truth (Baylis 1948). According to this theory, the correspondence between true propositions and facts is not some sort of abstract unspecified relation as many philosophers believe, but rather a species of exemplification. Facts embody or exemplify the abstract propositions which they make true just as particulars (a red flower) exemplify the abstract properties (being red) which they instantiate. In this way, Baylis' facts are defined as individuals that exemplify propositions. Any concrete individual can be singularly referred to. So, on Baylis' view, facts are objects of singular reference.

An immediate problem with Baylis' facts is how we are to symbolize such an alleged concrete fact, for example, the fact that Caesar is dead, so that the reference to this fact is secured? Presumably the fact cannot be stated by a sentence since a declarative sentence itself cannot be used to refer. When we sometimes use a sentence to refer to something, we actually transform the sentence into a correlated singular referring expression although the speaker may not realize such an undergoing transfor-

mation (Clark 1975). For the fact that Caesar died, there are many different nominalizing transformations which turn the sentence "Caesar died" into correlated singular referring expressions: it can be transformed into the singular referring expression, "Caesar's death"; or into "Caesar's dying"; or into "Caesar's being dead." However, what are expressed by these singular referring expressions are different from what is expressed by the statement that Caesar is dead. "Caesar's death" refers to an *event* that occurred at a time; "Caesar's dying" refers to a *process* that was protracted for a time; "Caesar's being dead" refers to the enduring terminal *state* that is neither dated nor protracted, but is observable. It is true that the existence of the event, the process and the state is dependent on a correlated fact that Caesar died, which, for this reason, can be called "fact-correlates." But, the fact-correlates are not themselves the facts with which they are correlated. The fact that Caesar died is neither the event, e.g., Caesar's death, nor the process, e.g., Caesar's dying, and nor the state, e.g., Caesar's being dead. The fact that Caesar died is abstract since it is not locatable, datable or observable, but its fact-correlates, namely, the event, the process, and the state are concrete since they are datable or observable. Can we date the fact that Caesar died? Obviously not since it is a fact that Caesar died in the past, at present and in the future. Can we locate the fact? The fact is not located in the room where Caesar died or the grave where Caesar was buried. Can we observe the fact? Somebody might say yes since his contemporaries were able to observe the dead body of Caesar. But to say that to observe Caesar's dead body is to *observe the fact that* Caesar died is to confuse the object-perception with the object of a propositional attitude. Surely you can see the dead body of Caesar (object-perception), but how can you *see that* Caesar died? In fact, the transition from "see the dead body of Caesar" to *"see* that Caesar died" involves a process of inference as follows: what you actually see is the dead body of Caesar, and by seeing it you *believe that* Caesar died or the observation of Caesar's dead body causes your belief that Caesar died. So the fact that Caesar died can only be *the object of a belief,* instead of *the object of sense perception.* Of course, if you like, you can still say that we can *see that* Caesar died. But you have to remember that *"see that"* here actually means "believe that." Therefore, Baylis' facts that are expressed by singular referring phrases are surely concrete, but they are not the facts as we have defined. The facts specified by that-clauses cannot be the objects of singular reference. Facts are not concrete particulars.

B. Facts As (Datable) Happenings

If facts are not simple entities such as particulars, facts can still b e complex concrete entities as happenings (events, episodes, or processes) as long as they are *datable*. For example, we might say that the Tiananmen Square event, e.g., the Chinese government cracking down pro-democracy movement, occurring at Beijing on the 4th of June of 1989, is a historical fact; the historical process of dinosaurs ruling the earth happening many millions ago is a fact; the event of Napoleon meeting his Waterloo is a fact, etc. We may label events, processes o r episodes as happenings, in the sense that they are all datable.

Troubles arise from identifying facts with concrete happenings. First, any happening occurs and ceases in time, but whatever is a fact remains a fact forever and therefore transcends time (in spite of some facts are facts with regard to a particular time). The Tiananmen Square event occurred at Beijing in 1989. When and where is the fact that the Chinese government cracked down the pro-democracy movement at Beijing in 1989 occurs? At Beijing in 1989 you might answer. Surely not, because it is the event of the Chinese government cracking down the pro-democracy movement that occurred at Beijing in 1989, not the fact that the Chinese government cracked down the pro-democracy movement at Beijing in 1989 occurred in 1989, since it is the fact even today (but the event does not occur today). Second, when we sometimes treat events are facts, we actually mean that it is a fact that such-and-such event took replace. When we say that it is a fact that the Chinese government cracked down the pro-democracy movement at Beijing in 1989, we are actually *declaring* this event *to be* a fact (it is real or it is true, instead of a rumor or the Western propaganda), rather than saying of the event that it *is* a fact or redescribing the event *as* a fact. To declare an event to be a fact is to *confirm* the reality of the event rather than to *identify* the event as a fact. This is the reason why a fact cannot be a concrete, datable or locatable entity since the fact, as a confirmation of the reality of an event, is an assertion and an assertion itself is not datable or locatable.

Third, we can reach the same conclusion from the distinction be-tween fact-correlates and correlated facts. According to this interpreta-tion, an event is correlated with a fact. This event can be called a fact-correlate since its existence depends on the fact with which the event is correlated. No matter how closely correlate with a fact, the fact-correlate

itself is not a fact. So, from that a fact-correlate is concrete entity it does not follow that the correlated fact is concrete entity. On the contrary, just because the correlated fact is abstract entity does the truth of a set of fact-correlates depend on the correlated fact. For example, consider the fact that Hitler died. Correlated with this fact, there are a set of fact-correlates, such as the event that is Hitler's death, the process of Hitler dying, and the state of Hitler being dead. The existence of all three fact-correlates depends on the fact that Hitler died in the sense that they presuppose the fact; if there were no such a fact all three fact-correlates could not exist. This fact, as a necessary presupposition of its fact-correlates, has to be abstract entity; otherwise, if it is a concrete entity occurring at some time (for instance, at the moment when Hitler was dead), then how can the existence of the process of Hitler dying depend on this unhappened event? (Unless a causal chain can be reversed!)

C. Facts As (Observable) Situations

A naturalist may acknowledge that facts are not at all like particulars or happenings. Indeed they are very unlike one another: we can speak of the physical properties, such as weight, color, texture, or location of particulars or happenings, but it makes no sense to speak of these physical properties of facts. Even so, facts are still concrete in the sense that they are observable through our sense perceptions as are particulars or happenings. Here, naturalists may well appeal to another criterion of concreteness of entities, that is, observability. For clarity, let us re-strict our analysis below to so-called existential facts that some factual naturalists regard as typical observable facts. It is claimed that there are existential facts about the existential states of some perceivable objects, such as the fact that the moon exists in the sky. According to this rea-soning, the fact that the moon is there is nothing but the existence of the moon. To perceive the existence of the moon is to perceive the moon itself. Therefore, the fact that the moon is there is perceivable, since the moon is perceivable.

The above argument is fallacious. The first premise of the argument identifies the fact that F exists with F's existence. The phrase "the exis-tence of F" sounds like a descriptive phrase. That seems to suggest that a fact can be described. But this is a misunderstanding. The phrase "the existence of F" has a special status that is different from other similar ex-pressions such as "the death of Caesar" or "the love of Romeo to Juliet."

These latter expressions are descriptive phrases since "the death" or "the love" is a property of the subject in question, e.g., Caesar or Romeo. In contrast, as Kant points out correctly in his objection to the ontological argument for the existence of God, "the existence" is not a property of a subject. So "the existence of F" is not a real descriptive phrase. As a matter of fact, the phrase "the existence of F" is only an abbreviation of a that-clause, e.g., that F exists. Therefore, by identifying F's existence with the fact that F exists does not make any substantial progress on naturalist side.

According to the second premise, to perceive an object F is to perceive the existence of F or the fact that F exists. If the identification of F's existence to the fact that F exists were idle, then the identification of perceiving the *object* F to perceiving the *existence* of F would be totally wrong due to a confusion between object-perception (perceiving an object F) and state-perception (perceiving that F is there). Sommers makes this distinction very clear: "When we see a cat, we see something alive or dead, male or female. But what we see when we see that a cat is there is none of those things. Indeed to allow that a fact like the cat (not) being there as something we observe is to give up the idea that what we observe must have the features of physical objects" (Sommers 1994, p. 36, notes). Considering a negative fact will drive the point to home. If the fact that a rabbit is not there is the same as the nonexistence of the rabbit, then how can you perceive the nonexistence of the rabbit? by perceiving a rabbit that is not there? The point is, as Kant has taught us, the existence or nonexistence of F is not a property of F that exists or not exists. Then how can we perceive a property that does not present in the universe?

The failure of the above factual naturalist argument for the observable existential facts[4] strengthens our belief that facts are not concrete. If so,

---

[4] Sommers (1994) tries to save the naive naturalist belief in concrete (observable) facts by offering a "robustly" realist account of existence and nonexistence. For Sommers, the existential states of objects are not the properties of the objects; instead, they are the properties of the world or about the existential state of the world under consideration as a whole. Therefore, the fact that the moon exists (or the existence of the moon) is not a fact in the world under consideration, but is a fact of this world. This is the reason why the search for concrete facts in the world is doomed to failure since facts are not in the world anyway. Sommers therefore claims that a fact-naturalist is not committed to the doctrine that facts are in the universe in order for they to be concrete. Instead, to say that the fact that the moon is there is concrete is, not to say that the existence of the moon is a property of the moon and

it would be foolish to demand specimens of concrete facts, as could be exhibited like lions in a zoo; it is confusion to suppose, as fact-naturalists have done, that facts can be discovered by taking a sharp look at the universe.

3.2 Factual Ontologism

I have argued that facts cannot be equated with any mind-independent concrete spatiotemporal entities in the universe. However, it does not follow that facts are not themselves mind-independent entities in the world. It is possible to maintain consistently both beliefs that there are mind-independent facts in the world as it is, and that facts are not concrete entities in the universe. This is what is claimed by fact-ontologism, according to which facts exist as mind-independent abstract entities in the world as it is.

Preoccupation with the facts specified by that-clauses leads us to suppose that the most plausible candidate for a mind-independent abstract fact can be found in the Wittgensteinian correspondence theory of truth: a statement is true if and only if it corresponds to an extra-linguistic fact. This fact-based correspondence theory seems to give us both the reason why facts are needed as a metaphysical category in its own right and a definition of fact an ontologist factualist needs: facts are needed for true statements to correspond to; a fact can be defined as an extra-linguistic complex entity, whatever it is, that makes a statement true or to which the statement corresponds when it is true. In this sense,

---

hence is perceivable, rather to say that the existence of the moon is a property of the world or an observable state of the physical environment.

In my opinion, Sommers' interpretation of existence represents a real progress in metaphysics. Unfortunately, it does not shed much light on the issue of concrete facts in hand. Sommers does not make it clear at all how we can perceive the fact that F exists (or the existence of F) by perceiving the observable existential state of the world under consideration. If we cannot even perceive an individual existential state of an object F, how can we perceive the existential state of the world as a whole? The gap between object-perception and state-perception does not disappear because of attributing existence to the world instead of to the objects. It is still not clear how we can bridge the gap by our sense perceptions only (We can of course bridge the gap in terms of reference: perceiving a cat as an object leads to the belief that a cat is there). Another problem with Sommers' solution is that his defense is at most good for the existence of concrete existential facts (the fact has the form that F exists), but not good for other kinds of facts, such as the fact that 2 + 2 = 4, the fact that economy is blooming in China during 1990s, etc.

the fact-based correspondence theory of truth serves also as a correspondence theory of facts. I will call the notion of fact given by fact-based correspondence theory of truth *the correspondence notion of facts,* and the facts *the correspondence facts.* It is clear when Russell said that facts are the kind of entities that make propositions true, he meant the correspondence facts.

Any attempt to justify the notion of correspondence facts quickly runs into the same difficulties faced by any fact-based correspondence notion of truth. If a fact is an entity to which a true statement corresponds, then we need an explanation of the notion of correspondence and that of truth. Attempts to explain correspondence to facts sink quickly into metaphors such as statements "mirrored" or "pictured" facts, such that "correspondence" becomes a mysterious relation (Devitt 1984, p.26). On the other hand, attempts to explain truth in terms of correspondence to facts are caught in an inherent circularity between the notion of facts and that of truth. Truth holds of a statement in virtue of its corresponding to a fact, while the fact is what the statement corresponds to. If facts are merely entities to which true statements correspond, it is manifestly circular to define truth in terms of fact, since facts can be defined only in terms of their correspondence to truths. So, by the same token, it is impossible to elucidate the notion of fact in terms of correspondence to true statements without a vicious circularity (Hamlyn 1962, pp. 198-199).

It seems to me that the real threat to the correspondence notion of facts consists in a danger of assimilating facts to true propositions so to exclude the possibility of a substantive correspondence theory on which the notion is based. To see this, let us consider the role of Russellian propositions (arrangements of the *referents* of linguistic expressions, given their senses) and Fregean propositions (arrangements of the *senses* of linguistic expressions) in the correspondence notion of facts in turn.

When Russell defines facts (Russellian facts) as the kind of entities that make propositions true or to which true propositions correspond, the definition seems referential since it does not tell us what kind of entity it is. But this is not the case. Russellian true propositions are composed of the same sort of entities (objects, properties, and relations) as facts are. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to say that Russellian propositions, when true, are *identical to* facts, rather than to say that facts are

what true propositions *correspond to.* In other words, for any Russellian proposition that *p,* "It is true that *p*" simply means "It is a fact that *p.*" Both are composed of the same objects, properties or relations existing in the world. Borrowing Strawson's comment, Russellian facts and his true propositions indeed fit each other since they are identical and are made for each other. But this means that nothing makes a proposition true or nothing to which a true proposition corresponds. What we can say is only that a proposition, when true, corresponds to itself. Then, it does not make sense at all to say that a fact is what *makes* a proposition true or that to which a true proposition *corresponds* since there is nothing for a true proposition to correspond to. The possibility of a substantive correspondence theory of truth on which the correspondence notion of facts is based is excluded. We cannot make sense of the correspondence facts.

Turning to Fregean propositions, there are two ways to go to define fact (Horwich 1990, p. 114). One option is to introduce Fregean facts in terms of correspondence to Fregean propositions: a Fregean fact is the kind of entity to which a Fregean proposition corresponds. According to this definition, the (Fregean) fact that Phosphorous is Phosphorous is not the same as the (Fregean) fact that Phosphorous is Hesperus, for the (Fregean) proposition that Phosphorous is Phosphorous is not the same as the (Fregean) proposition that Phosphorous is Hesperus. Presumably, the nature of Fregean facts is fully determined by the nature of Fregean propositions. Fregean facts so defined are not independent of the Fregean propositions which state them. In fact, there is no other way to specify a fact except by means of that-clauses, here, Fregean propositions. Any attempt to specify a Fregean fact independently of the making of a Fregean proposition is fruitless. Therefore, Fregean true propositions and Fregean facts are internally interdependent. If so, Fregean propositions, when true, would be *identical to* Fregean facts for there would be nothing independent of Fregean propositions to appeal. Once again we would be excluding the possibility of a substantive correspondence theory.

We might also define Russellian facts in terms of Fregean propositions: a Russellian fact is the kind of entity to which a Fregean proposition, when true, corresponds. This is, in effect, Wittgenstein's "picture theory." Here, Fregean propositions and Russellian facts are totally different entities; the former are abstract linguistic entities while the latter are concrete extra-linguistic entities. Fregean propositions must be

compared with Russellian facts in order to discover whether the former corresponds to the latter. To compare, the propositions and the facts must be entities that are independent of each other but of the same kind. Then, how can two different kinds of entities, i.e., Fregean propositions and Russellian facts, correspond to each other? One might point out that Fregean propositions and Russellian facts can be correspond to each other by means of referential relation: a Fregean proposition consists of elements arranged in a certain logical form, and the corresponding Russellian fact consists of the referents of the elements arranged in the same logical form as in the Fregean proposition. However, this referential interpretation of the correspondence between facts and propositions is not allowed by a correspondence theory of fact for it would reduce the correspondence to *facts* to the correspondence to *things*. Either way, to define a fact as that to which a Fregean proposition corresponds would lose the substance of the correspondence theory of facts.

To sum up, we cannot make sense of the correspondence notion of facts. If the alleged facts are concrete as objects are, then it is not clear at all why we should introduce the concept of correspondence facts in the first place; if the alleged facts are abstract, then they would be *equated to*, instead of *correspond to*, true propositions. To the best of my knowledge, the correspondence notion of facts is the most plausible candidate for abstract mind-independent facts. The failure of the correspondence facts leads to my conclusion that there are no mind-independent abstract facts.

3.3 A Misconception of the Nature of Facts

To enforce the conclusion we have reached so far that there are no extra-linguistic, mind-independent facts (either concrete or abstract), it is necessary to point out a misconception of the nature of facts shared by external factual realists: that facts have some hidden structure or the intrinsic essence, the special quality that all facts supposedly have in common, out there in the world awaiting for us to discover. For example, George Adam describes such an underlying nature of facts as follows:

> You mean by "fact" that which has a determinate nature of its own, quite in-
> dependent of our human finding and making, our interests, hypotheses and
> assumptions. You mean by "fact," as Mr. Roelofs reminded us, that which is

> untouched by any theory of ours, that which retains its own intrinsic nature
> in the face of competing, alternative and changing theories, interests and per-
> spectives. Facts are the constituents of reality (Adam 1931, pp. 204-205).

We can trace such an insight about the substantial nature of facts to a misleading linguistic analogy based on the pattern of subject-predicate sentences. The sentence, "That *p* is a fact," has the same subject-predicate structure as other sentences such as "Betty is a cat." In the sentence "Betty is a cat," the predicate "is a cat" distributes the subject to the pre-existing category "cats." Thus, it seems that the predicate "is a fact," distributes certain complex entities to a pre-existing ontological category "facts." There is some underlying defining nature shared by all entities falling in the category "facts," just as there is some essential feature shared by all individual cats. Although we might be wrong, or might never know about this intrinsic nature, it is out there awaiting us to reveal.

I doubt whether such a linguistic analogy is legitimate. We might ask whether there is much to be said for a parsing of "That *p* is a fact" which would make it out to be like "Betty is a cat" in respect to anything beyond its superficial grammatical form. The expression might have a meaning somewhat disguised by its superficial grammatical form. The word "exists" provides a notorious classical example. We are facing the same sort of problem here. Unlike most other ordinary predicates, "is a fact" is not used to distribute certain entities to a pre-existing ontological category called "facts." The role of facts is not what it seems. I suspect that the external factual realism's attempt to discern the essence of facts is just a pseudo-problem based on syntactic overgeneralization of the pattern of subject-predicate sentences.

In fact, the linguistic analogy between the fact predicate and ordinary predicates is illegitimate. In many occasions the fact predicate is eliminable in a way which a common name such as "cat" is not. This is because, in many contexts, the predicate "is a fact" serves simply as an emphatic device for assertion, the occurrence of which marks the speaker's commitment to the truth of an implied sub-assertion. For example, the sentence, "*It is a fact that* Napoleon was born in Corsica," simply means that Napoleon was born in Corsica, which can be expressed by the sentence, "Napoleon was born in Corsica" (Black 1964, p. 32). Even in many other occasions in which it is not appropriate to eliminate the term "fact" totally, we can still convert a fact predicate into

an adverbial phrase. For example, the sentence *"It is a fact that* Snow is white" can be conveyed by a near equivalent sentence, "Snow is *in fact* white." Similarly, we can say, "Snow is *truly* white" instead of say, *"It is true that* snow is white." There is no necessity to think of a fact phrase as a predicate of that-clause. For this reason, "'It is fact that p' is best understood, not as a predication, but as a co-ordination of the two clauses which it comprises, so as: 'It is fact: p' or 'A fact: p', the 'it' being a mere dummy pronoun rather than a stand-in for what follows" (Rundle 1993, p.16). In addition, the grammatical subject of a fact-stating sentence is not a real logical subject. The reasons are much as with the accepted denial that the grammatical subject of an existential sentence is a logical subject. A logical subject usually has a genuine referent. But a that-clause (a noun clause) is surely a most implausible contender for the role of referring to something. As Russell and Wittgenstein have argued, that-clause cannot be used to *designate or refer to* anything, but can only be used to *state* something. So that-clause should be denied a referential role in "It is a fact *that p."*

There are no extra-linguistic, mind-independent facts, no matter whether they are concrete or abstract. So external factual realism fails. But I have to emphasize that this conclusion does not imply that facts do not exist as anti-factualism claims. It only means that facts are not mind-independent worldly items.

4. Facts as True Propositions

If facts do not exist in the world as mind-independent, extra-linguistic entities, then it seems more promising to say that facts, if they are real, can be found within the bound of language.[5] Despairing of finding some type of entity in the world itself with which to equate facts, some philosophers have tried to equate them with propositions, or more precisely, with true propositions. For them, the thesis that facts are specified by true statements suggests that facts are not just dependent of the propositions which state them but rather *identical to* the propositions themselves.[6] According to Bolzano, facts are true proposi-

---

[5] In a broad sense of linguistic entities which include sentences, statements, and propositions. Strictly speaking, we should call them quasi-linguistic entities to distinguish them from pure linguistic entities such as words or utterance.

[6] It is obvious that Russellian true propositions do not fit such a description of facts since Russellian propositions are extra-linguistic entities as Russellian facts are.

tions. Bolzano holds that there is a certain kind of entity which finishes the content of mental acts of judging and the meanings of sentences. These entities, which we can call propositions, are neither mental entities like the act of asserting or judging nor pure linguistic entities (in a narrow sense) like utterances. Instead they are abstract linguistic entities. The category of propositions divides further into two kinds, true propositions and false propositions; the former being "facts." Like Bolzano, many natural factualists claim that equating facts with true propositions is the only alternative for denial of facts as concrete entities.

Looking for facts within language comes closer to truth than looking for them in the world as it is. There is obviously a close conceptual connection between facts and true propositions as suggested in our minimal definition of facts. Although a more roundabout equivalence between the notion of facts and that of truth propositions remains a possibility (this is what I want to explore later), it is wrong to simply identify facts with true propositions.

The reason why there is no simple equation of facts with true propositions is not that facts, as external factual realists claim, are what exist out there in the world which make propositions true when they are true. There is no foundation to hold that facts are mind-independent, extra-linguistic entities to which true propositions correspond. But dismissing the existence of mind-independent facts does not reduce facts to linguistic entities, i.e., true Fregean propositions. The notions of facts and true propositions are essentially different. The employment of the notion of facts presupposes the existence of such a world under consideration. We find ourselves with certain ways of thinking (modes of thought) about this world. These are reflected within language in the existence of certain distinct uses of expressions; e.g., we name things by referring expressions, attribute properties by describing expressions, and specify facts by that-clauses. We can explain a category of beings only by reference to the modes of thought by which we specify it. Facts are entities specified by the making of true statements; hence they are merely what true statements specify. But what is specified by a true statement is not the same thing as the true statement used to specify. What is specified

---

In fact, what the advocates of identification of facts with true propositions try to do is to reduce Russellian facts to Fregean propositions. So our discussion here will only focus on Fregean propositions.

exists in a world under consideration, whereas the true statement used to specify is correlated conceptual entity existing within a language or thought (in broad sense). Using Austin's words, " 'Fact that' is a phrase designed for use in situations where the distinction between a true statement and the state of affairs about which it is a truth is neglected... So speaking about 'the fact that' is a compendious way of speaking about a situation involving words and world" (Austin 1950, p.118). For this reason, we can say that the category of facts arises at the frontiers between a world under consideration and language / thought (our representation of it). Therefore the notion of fact is a metaphysical one. In contrast, the notion of propositions have their home in semantics. The contrast is clear when the propositions are construed as Fregean propositions which are thought or meaning of correlated sentences. Facts are made up of the various objects, properties, and relations while propositions are made up of the concepts of them.

One might object that even if the notion of facts and that of true propositions are essentially different (the former is metaphysical while the latter semantic), there is still a one-to-one correspondence relation between a fact and a true proposition. "For every true statement there exists 'one' and its own precisely corresponding fact--for every cap the head it fits." (Austin 1950, p.117) In this sense, we could still say that facts are identical (in a broad sense) with true propositions.

However, true propositions and facts, although related closely, are not related in a one-to-one correspondence. Here, for the sake of argument, let us use the language of the correspondence theory of facts. Imagine the following situation: suppose that John loves Jenny and Bill loves her also. And suppose that Jenny's mother knows Bill and the relationship between Jenny and Bill; Jenny's father does not know Bill but finds out somehow that the boy in the green dress (who is actually Bill) loves Jenny. (a) Then, the fact that Bill loves Jenny makes both Jenny's mother's belief that Bill loves Jenny and Jenny's father's belief that the boy in the green dress loves Jenny true. Clearly Jenny's father's and Jenny's mother's objects of beliefs (Fregean propositions) are distinct and neither of two beliefs entails the other. That means that one and the same fact may make true more than one proposition neither of which entails the other. (b) It is obvious that the one and the same fact can make more than two propositions true if either of them entails the other. The fact that Bill loves Jenny makes both the proposition that Bill loves Jenny and the proposition that someone loves Jenny true since the

former entails the latter. (c) Two distinct, unrelated facts can make one proposition true. Either the fact that John loves Jenny or the fact that Bill loves Jenny makes the proposition that someone loves Jenny true, but the proposition asserts neither of two facts. That means that a fact which makes a proposition true is not necessarily the fact which is asserted or specified by the proposition.

5. Internal Factual Realism

To recapitulate what we have gained so far based on our minimal definition of facts: (a) what are specified by true statements are not identical to true propositions expressed. Facts are not linguistic entities; (b) what are specified by true statements are not to which a true statement corresponds. Facts are not mind-independent, either as concrete entities in the universe or as abstract entities in the world as it is.

We are left with two alternatives. According to anti-factualism, if facts are neither in the world as it is nor within language, then "facts" fail to be true of any entities whatsoever. A fact becomes a pseudo-material correlate of a true statement and therefore is not real in any substantial sense. Then we fall back directly to the traditional Aristotelian metaphysics, i.e., the world is the totality of things instead of facts. It is beyond the scope of the current paper to make a complete evaluation between these two competing concepts of ontology: the world as the totality of thing (thing-ontology) and the world as the totality of facts (fact-ontology). For my limited purpose, I have taken the stand of fact-ontology from the outset. To repeat our question of concern: "If the world is a totality of facts, then what sort of facts are there in the world? Where are facts?"

The other alternative would be: based on our previous arguments that facts are neither linguistic nor mind-independent and that facts are not concrete entities in the universe, facts would be non-linguistic, mind-dependent, abstract complex entities specified by true statements. Facts are real correlates or objective counterparts of true statements. If so, where are they on earth? Internal factual realists reply: a fact, as a non-linguistic correlate of a true statement of a language, exists in a world specified by the language.

I have argued in section 2 that there is a necessary conceptual bond between true statements and facts. The category of facts is specified only by the making of true statements; hence they are merely what true

statements specify. The concept of facts would have no application for anyone who did not know what it was to make a true statement. It would be wrong to assert that there is any other way except by making true statements in which the facts may be specified. To this extent, the obtaining of facts in general is dependent on our linguistic speakers, i.e., our being able to make true statements. Of course, this does not mean that facts have nothing to do with the structure of a world. The notion of facts arises from a consideration of ways of thinking about the world. The employment of the notion of facts presupposes the existence of a world perceived by the speaker. This world should have some fixed structure; otherwise the possibility of stating facts would not have arisen either. For example, if the world perceived by the speaker is a Heraclitean world of constant flux, it would be impossible to say anything, not to mention to make a true statement. So our employment of the notion of facts depends upon both the existence of an objective world around the speaker and the speaker's ability to make true statements.

The evaluation of a declarative sentence should be conceived as comprising two seldom-separated stages. First, determine the truth-value-status of the sentence: is it a candidate for truth or falsity? To this question, the answer is language-dependent. And second, supposing a positive answer to the first, is the statement true? Therefore, whether a statement is true depends on whether the sentence of a language L which states the statement has a truth-value. Whether or not a sentence, when considered within L, has a truth-value is determined in turn by whether a semantic presupposition of the sentence is true in L. This is because, according to Strawson's trivalent semantics (Strawson 1950), the truth of a semantic presupposition of a sentence is necessary for the truth or falsity of the sentence. For example, sentence K: "The present king of France is bald," presupposes sentence K_a: "The present king of France exists." K is true or false only when K_a is true; otherwise K is neither true nor false.

Core sentences of many theoretical languages, such as scientific languages, presuppose some common fundamental semantic presuppositions. For example, the existence of phlogiston is presupposed by numerous core sentences of the language of phlogiston theory. Likewise, the assumption that there exists absolute space and time underlies the core sentences of the Newtonian language of space and time. These

shared fundamental semantic presuppositions of a language are referred to as its metaphysical presuppositions, which are contingent factual presumptions about the world perceived by the language community. A sentence may state a true statement in one language, but it may be not assertable or has no truth-value at all in another. As an example, consider the following two Newtonian sentences about simultaneity and precedence (Gaifman, 1984).

(A)   Event e_1 and event e_2 are simultaneous: $\tau(e_1) = \tau(e_2)$.

(B)   Event e_1 precedes event e_2: $\tau(e_1) < \tau(e_2)$.

A and B make perfect sense and are true-or-false in Newtonian physics since, for Newton, physical events happen within a self-existing, ordered line of time points independent of any event. However, according to the relativity theory, precedence may depend on the coordinate system from which the events are viewed. More precisely, if in some coordinate system the events are separated by distance d and time Δt and $d > c \times \Delta t$ (c = light velocity), then their temporal order depends on the coordinate system. Therefore, to ask, "Does event e_1 precede e_2?" or "Are e_1 and e_2 simultaneous?" without specifying a coordinate system is to ask a factually meaningless question. This is because the notion of absolute simultaneity presupposes the existence of an absolute time ordering which is denied by the relativity theory. Thus A and B have no truth-values from the relativistic point of view. Similarly, the language of phlogiston theory presupposes the existence of phlogiston. To say, "The element a is not richer in phlogiston than the element b" presupposes that "There exists phlogiston." The sentence may be true when considered within the language of phlogiston theory, but it is neither true nor false when considered within the language of modern chemistry theory.

If a fact is whatever is specified by a true statement, and whether or not a statement is true is language-dependent, then a fact turns out to be language-dependent. That means that facts are relative to a theoretical language and exist in the world specified by the language. There are no absolute mind-independent facts out there awaiting us to discover. Some theory, language, conceptual scheme, or theoretical preconception is the indispensable medium through which we apprehend facts. Not to mention some facts dealing with theoretical entities (such as the fact that water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen), even the most common conceivable facts concerning detectable properties of some observable

common objects (such as the fact that this flower is red) are still penetrated with some theoretical framework. What could be further beyond question than the fact that my pen is blue? However, even this fact presupposes some theoretical assumptions which are at risk against the following metaphysical claim: that the secondary qualities are subjective. The situation here alluded to is familiar enough. The matter requires no elaboration here. All facts are language/theory laden. A definite and specific theoretical context is operative in the initiation (creation), identification, recognition, and description of every fact. Rid yourself of every theoretical preconception, and facts are banished also.

More significantly, facts are not just language-dependent in general, but sometimes a state of affairs which is a fact when considered within one theoretical language may not be a fact, even may not be a possible fact,[7] when considered within another theoretical language, since the statement used to describe the state of affairs may be true in the first language but false or neither true nor false in the second language. Suppose that a statement that the element a is richer in phlogiston than the element b is true when considered within the language of phlogiston theory. Then the state of affairs specified by the statement is a fact existing in the world specified by the language. But the apparently same state of affairs is not a fact, not even a possible fact, when considered within the language of modern chemistry; since the corresponding sentence is neither true nor false when considered within the latter language. That means that many facts--although not all facts--are relative to each distinct language and cannot be the same across distinct worlds specified by those distinct languages. Similarly, sentence A may be a fact within the Newtonian language but not a fact, not even a possible fact, within the language of relativity theory.

---

[7] A possible fact is an extra-linguistic sentential correlate which is correlated with a sentence with a truth-value. For example, the states of affairs specified by either the statement that snow is white or the statement that snow is black are all possible facts. A state of affairs is a possible fact from the perspective of a theoretical language L if and only if the sentence used to specify it, when considered within the context of L, is true or false. Since the truth-value-status of a sentence is language-dependent, whether or not a state of affairs specified by the sentence is a possible fact is language-dependent. The state of affairs specified by the sentence, "The mixture of yin and rain makes people sleepy," is a possible fact from the point of view of Chinese medical theory. However, the same state of affairs is not a possible fact from a Western physician's point of view.

Generally put, what is acclaimed as factual in language L_1 is often seen to be non-factual in language L_2, because in L_2 a new horizon of fact has appeared which, in its turn and in a different language, will be judged to be non-factual. It is only such an influx of fresh fact which dislodges old fact from the domain of factuality and stamps it as non-factual. Therefore, the alleged difference between fact and non-fact should be viewed merely as the distinction between two different sets of facts, each set specified within different theoretical languages.

Does it follow that the distinction between fact and non-fact is hereby deprived of any ultimate validity since it appears that we can turn at will a fact into a non-fact by switch of theoretical languages? No, we can still draw a valid distinction between fact and non-fact. Facts are still objective. For once a specific language is chosen, there is no room for negotiation; the distinction between fact and non-fact is fixed. Astronomic events that are simultaneous in one frame of reference are successive in another. But that two events are simultaneous (or are successive) is a fact (or is not a fact) in one specific frame of reference. From the possibility of mutual transformation of facts into non-facts, it does not follow that the distinction between facts and non-facts is shaky and hazardous. However, such objectivity might seem spurious if we can switch languages at will. The problem is that even though we can construct an appropriate language that determines and fixes a fact, we cannot construct whatever we want and we cannot switch languages at will. Although we can construct a language in which the event of e_1 preceding event e_2 is a fact, we cannot construct a language in which that e_1 happens prior to and posterior to e_2 turns out to be a fact.

6. Conclusion

The traditional questions, "What is a fact?" or "When do we use the phrase 'is a fact'?" is misleading. The question seems to suggest that facts have some intrinsic nature awaiting discovery. External factual realism arises as an attempt to answer such a question. Such an attempt is doomed to failure for there are no mind-independent facts. Most (if not all) facts are language-dependent. Our task is not to make sense of some unfathomable entity, but in so far as there is a problem, it is one of knowing when we are entitled to proclaim something a fact. So the more appropriate question to ask about facts should be: "How do we use the phrase 'is a fact'?" or "When are we entitled to proclaim some

complex entity a fact?" Such a switch in the way of asking questions about facts is necessary and illuminating. The answer to the question has to be language dependent.

Juniata College

References

Adam, G. (1931) "Facts and Perspectives", in *Studies in Nature of Facts*, by the Philosophical Union of University of California, University of California Press, pp. 203-232.

Austin, J. (1950) "Truth", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Suppl) 24:111-128.

Baylis, C. (1948) "Facts, Properties, Exemplification and Truth", *Mind* 57: 459-479.

Black, M. (1964) *A Companion to Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus'*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Clark, R. (1975) "Facts, Fact-Correlates, and Fact-Surrogates", in P. Welsh, ed., *Facts, Value, and Perception*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 3-17. Devitt, M. (1984) *Realism and Truth*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Gaifman, H. (1984) "Why Language?" in W. Balzer et al. (eds.), *Reduction in Science*, Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, pp. 319-330.

Hamlyn, D. (1962) "The Correspondence Theory of Truth", *Philosophical Quarterly* 12: 193-205.

Horwich, P. (1990) *Truth*, Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.

Rundle, B. (1993) *Fact*, London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.

Russell, B. (1918) "The Problems of Logical Atomism", *Monist* 28 & 29(1918 & 1919).

Sommers, F. (1994) "Naturalism and Realism", in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. XIX, the University of Notre Dame, pp. 22-38.

Strawson. P. (1950) "Truth", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (suppl.)* 24: 129-156.

Wittgenstein, L. (1961) *Tractatus: Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

MENTAL CONTENT: MANY SEMANTICS, ONE SINGLE PROJECT [1]

LIZA SKIDELSKY

When we talk about intentional states, the waters are divided into two major groups: there are philosophers who think it is worthwhile to develop a semantic for mental content and there are those who think otherwise.[2] The former hold this position because, among other reasons, they consider the constituents of mental content to be internal representations, so the task should be to explain how our mental representations obtain their meaning. In addition, they believe that the relation between representations and the world must be a natural one. Therefore, they think that the intentional properties of mental states must be linked to something in the natural world, otherwise they are eliminated or we are left with dualism. By *intentional properties* we mean a kind of mental property, that consists in an organism being in a certain state of belief, desire, etc., which is 'about' something. For these philosophers, the *natural world* means the world of the natural sciences, which is why it is better to call this project *scientistic naturalism*.[3] This project con-

---

[1] Previous versions were presented at the round table: "Naturalism and Philosophy" at the Coloquio de Filosofía Teórica, Sadaf, Argentina, November 19th to 20th, 1999, and the Conference on Language, Mind and World, Tlaxcala, México, March 14th to 17th, 2001. The paper was improved thanks to the helpful comments of the participants of these events, specially Ernie Lepore, Rob Stainton, Daniel Stoljar, and Tim Kenyon. Although they did not agree with me on any point of the WN, they contributed to focusing my thoughts on these issues. I thank Eduardo Rabossi, Pablo Rychter, and Julia Vergara for reading a previous version. I am indebted to Diana Pérez whose detailed comments on various versions and helpful discussions of these issues are reflected in most of the article.

[2] I will use the terms 'mental' and 'intentional' interchangeably. I will do the same for the terms 'intentional' and 'semantic'.

[3] I follow Philip Pettit (1992) in the utilization of this expression.